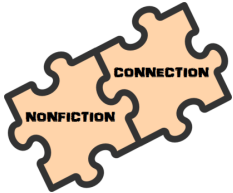


8th grade Civil Rights Poetry

- Jim Crow
- Lynching
- Montgomery Bus Boycott
- Little Rock Nine
- 16th Street Baptist Church Bombing
- The Poetry of Langston Hughes
- Parting Thoughts



Jim Crow Laws

The segregation and disenfranchisement laws known as "Jim Crow" represented a formal, codified system of racial apartheid that dominated the American South for three quarters of a century beginning in the 1890s. The laws affected almost every aspect of daily life, mandating segregation of schools, parks, libraries, drinking fountains, restrooms, buses, trains, and restaurants. "Whites Only" and "Colored" signs were constant reminders of the enforced racial order.

In legal theory, blacks received "separate but equal" treatment under the law — in actuality, public facilities for blacks were nearly always inferior to those for whites, when they existed at all. In addition, blacks were systematically denied the right to vote in most of the rural South through the selective application of literacy tests and other racially motivated criteria.

The Jim Crow system was upheld by local government officials and reinforced by acts of terror perpetrated by Vigilantes. In 1896, the Supreme Court established the doctrine of separate but equal in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, after a black man in New Orleans attempted to sit in a whites-only railway car.

In 1908, journalist Ray Stannard Baker observed that "no other point of race contact is so much and so bitterly discussed among Negroes as the Jim Crow car." As bus travel became widespread in the South over the first half of the 20th century, it followed the same pattern.

"Travel in the segregated South for black people was humiliating," recalled Diane Nash in her interview for *Freedom Riders*. "The very fact that there were separate facilities was to say to black people and white people that blacks were so subhuman and so inferior that we could not even use the public facilities that white people used." Transit was a core component of segregation in the South, as the 1947 Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) pamphlet and Bayard Rustin song, "You Don't Have to Ride Jim Crow" attests. Keeping whites and blacks from sitting together on a bus, train, or trolley car might seem insignificant, but it was one more link in a system of segregation that had to be defended at all times — lest it collapse. Thus transit was a logical point of attack for the foes of segregation, in the courtroom and on the buses themselves.

It would take several decades of legal action and months of nonviolent direct action before these efforts achieved their intended result.

Merry-go-round

by Langston Hughes

Where is the Jim Crow section 1
On this "Merry-go-round", 2
Mister, cause I want to ride? 3
Down South where I come from 4
White and colored 5
Can't sit side by side. 6
Down South on the train 7
There's a Jim Crow car. 8
On the bus we're put in the back— 9
But there ain't no back 10
To a "Merry-go-round"! 11
Where's the horse 12
For a kid that's black? 13



Incident

by Countee Cullen

Once riding in old Baltimore, 1
Heart-filled, head-filled with glee, 2
I saw a Baltimorean 3
Keep looking straight at me. 4
Now I was eight and very small, 5
And he was no whit bigger, 6
And so I smiled, but he poked out 7
His tongue and called me, "Nigger." 8
I saw the whole of Baltimore, 9
From May until December; 10
Of all the things that happened there, 11
That's all that I remember. 12



Martin's Letter

by Carole Boston Weatherford

(For Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Though sermons rolled off his tongue, 1
Martin could not find the words 2
to tell his little brown girl 3
why Funtown's gates were closed to her 4
or that the "Colored Only" sign 5
on the drinking fountain didn't mean 6
the water was a different hue. 7
But in a jail cell in Birmingham, 8
he found the words to tell the holy men 9
why he would not halt the marches. 10
He would rather fight off 11
police dogs and face fire hoses 12
than wipe his daughter's tears. 13



JIM CROW by Eve Merriam

("Few have any idea of the relative recency of the Jim Crow laws ..." from *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* by C. Vann Woodward, Professor of History, Johns Hopkins University.)

Now you and I have always heard 1
That Jim Crow's such a tough old bird, 2
Flapped around forever and a day, 3
Still he around on Judgment Day 4
Never going to chase that *bird* away! 5

Now that's the story we've always heard: 6
Jim Crow old as old can he, 7
Oldest bird in our history ... 8
Born before the Civil War, 9
Way way hack, long before 10
Old Jim Crow's been strictly legal 11
Longer than the American eagle. 12
Such a long-time flying bird! 13

Long-time lying story heard. 14
Don't believe it, not a single word. 15
Turn to the truth of history. 16
Learn for yourself from history. 17
Jim Crow never came alive until 1895. 18
Never had segregation before; 19
No time before the Civil War. 20
Not even in the Civil War. 21

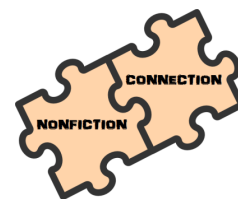
Then Reconstruction come along — 22
You bet Jim Crow didn't come along! 23

When Reconstruction got done wrong 24
Still Jim Crow didn't come along! 25

Not till much *much* later on: 26
That's when Jim Crow first came on. 27

Old Jim Crow's hold not so old. 28
Not so long. Not so strong. 29
Not such a much of a tough old bird ... 30
Not such a long — time flying time 31
As History goes, as Jim Crow flies ... 32
Time enough. So long! Shoofly! 33





People & Events: Lynching in America

For many African Americans growing up in the South in the 19th and 20th centuries, the threat of lynching was commonplace. The popular image of an angry white mob stringing a black man up to a tree is only half the story. Lynching, an act of terror meant to spread fear among blacks, served the broad social purpose of maintaining white supremacy in the economic, social and political spheres.

Pervasive Threat

Author Richard Wright, who was born near Natchez in southwest Mississippi, knew of two men who were lynched -- his step-uncle and the brother of a neighborhood friend. In his book *Black Boy*, he wrote: "The things that influenced my conduct as a Negro did not have to happen to me directly; I needed but to hear of them to feel their full effects in the deepest layers of my consciousness. Indeed, the white brutality that I had not seen was a more effective control of my behavior than that which I knew."

Rise in Black Prominence

Although the practice of lynching had existed since before slavery, it gained momentum during Reconstruction, when viable black towns sprang up across the South and African Americans began to make political and economic inroads by registering to vote, establishing businesses and running for public office. Many whites -- landowners and poor whites -- felt threatened by this rise in black prominence. Foremost on their minds was a fear of sex between the races. Some whites espoused the idea that black men were sexual predators and wanted integration in order to be with white women.

Public Events

Lynchings were frequently committed with the most flagrant public display. Like executions by guillotine in medieval times, lynchings were often advertised in newspapers and drew large crowds of white families. They were a kind of vigilantism where Southern white men saw themselves as protectors of their way of life and their white women. By the early twentieth century, the writer Mark Twain had a name for it: the United States of Lyncherdom.

Headlines and Grisly Souvenirs

Lynchings were covered in local newspapers with headlines spelling out the horrific details. Photos of victims, with exultant white observers posed next to them, were taken for distribution in newspapers or on postcards. Body parts were sometimes distributed to spectators or put on public display. Most infractions were for petty crimes, like theft, but the biggest one of all was looking at or associating with white women. Many victims were black businessmen or black men who refused to back down from a fight. Headlines such as the following were not uncommon:

"Five White Men Take Negro Into Woods; Kill Him: Had Been Charged with Associating with White Women" went over *The Associated Press* wires about a lynching in Shreveport, Louisiana.

"Negro Is Slain By Texas Posse: Victim's Heart Removed After His Capture By Armed Men" was published in *The New York World Telegram* on December 8, 1933.

"Negro and White Scuffle; Negro Is Jailed, Lynched" was published in the *Atlanta Constitution* on July 6, 1933.

Newspapers even printed that prominent white citizens in local towns attended lynchings, and often published victory pictures -- smiling crowds, many with children in tow -- standing next to the corpse.

Thousands of Victims

In the South, an estimated two or three blacks were lynched each week in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In Mississippi alone, 500 blacks were lynched from the 1800s to 1955. Nationwide, the figure climbed to nearly 5,000.

Killed for Being "Insolent"

Although rape is often cited as a rationale, statistics now show that only about one-fourth of lynchings from 1880 to 1930 were prompted by an accusation of rape. In fact, most victims of lynching were political activists, labor organizers or black men and women who violated white expectations of black deference, and were deemed "uppity" or "insolent." Though most victims were black men, women were by no means exempt.

One Woman's Crusade

According to black journalist and editor Ida B. Wells, who launched a fierce anti-lynching campaign in the 1890s, the lynching of successful black people was a means of subordinating potential black economic competitors. She also argued that consensual sex between black men and white women, while forbidden, was widespread. Thus lynching was also a means of imposing order on white women's sexuality. Wells, who would later help found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, was forced to flee Memphis after her offices were torched.

Total Repression

With lynching as a violent backdrop in the South, Jim Crow as the law of the land, and the poverty of the sharecropper system, blacks had no recourse. This triage of repression ensured blacks would remain impoverished, endangered, and without rights or hope. Whites could accuse at will and rarely was a white punished for a crime committed against a black. Even for those whites who were opposed to lynching, there was not much they could do. If there was an investigation, white citizens closed ranks to protect their own and rarely were mob leaders identified.

Violence Tapered Off

Violence against blacks would taper off during the second World War and rise again after the passage of the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that nullified the country's separate-but-equal doctrine. Armed with hope, blacks began to register and organize people to vote. Local NAACP chapters began sprouting up in small towns.

Shock Over Till

When Emmett Till was murdered, the head of the NAACP, Roy Wilkins, lambasted Mississippi and called Emmett's murder a lynching. "It would appear from this lynching that the State of Mississippi has decided to maintain white supremacy by murdering children."

The brutal slaying of a 14-year-old boy was shocking, and when the killers later confessed to the crime in an article published in *Look* magazine, African Americans and others who supported civil liberties realized they would have to organize en masse and risk their lives in order to bring change.

From www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/peopleevents/e_lynch.html

At least 3,446 African Americans were lynched between 1882 and 1968. In the 1960s, murder was still used as a tool to suppress civil rights workers, both black and white: Medgar Evers was assassinated June 12, 1963; Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman were murdered on June 21, 1964; and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated on April 4th, 1968. Even in 2003, 2,548 hate crimes against African Americans were reported by the FBI, including 4 murders. An additional 4,941 crimes (including 10 murders) were committed that year because of the victim's race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disability.

THE HAUNTED OAK

by Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906)

Pray why are you so bare, so bare,	1	They have fooled the jailer with lying words,	33
Oh, bough of the old oak-tree;	2	They have fooled the man with lies;	34
And why, when I go through the shade you throw,	3	The bolts unbar, the locks are drawn,	35
Runs a shudder over me?	4	And the great door open flies.	36
My leaves were green as the best, I trow,	5	Now they have taken him from the jail,	37
And sap ran free in my veins,	6	And hard and fast they ride,	38
But I saw in the moonlight dim and weird	7	And the leader laughs low down in his throat,	39
A guiltless victim's pains.	8	As they halt my trunk beside.	40
I bent me down to hear his sigh;	9	Oh, the judge, he wore a mask of black,	41
I shook with his gurgling moan,	10	And the doctor one of white,	42
And I trembled sore when they rode away,	11	And the minister, with his oldest son,	43
And left him here alone.	12	Was curiously bedight.	44
They'd charged him with the old, old crime,	13	Oh, foolish man, why weep you now?	45
And set him fast in jail:	14	'Tis but a little space,	46
Oh, why does the dog howl all night long,	15	And the time will come when these shall dread	47
And why does the night wind wail?	16	The mem'ry of your face.	48
He prayed his prayer and he swore his oath,	17	I feel the rope against my bark,	49
And he raised his hand to the sky;	18	And the weight of him in my grain,	50
But the beat of hoofs smote on his ear,	19	I feel in the throe of his final woe	51
And the steady tread drew nigh.	20	The touch of my own last pain.	52
Who is it rides by night, by night,	21	And never more shall leaves come forth	53
Over the moonlit road?	22	On the bough that bears the ban;	54
And what is the spur that keeps the pace,	23	I am burned with dread, I am dried and dead,	55
What is the galling goad?	24	From the curse of a guiltless man.	56
And now they beat at the prison door,	25	And ever the judge rides by, rides by,	57
"Ho, keeper, do not stay!	26	And goes to hunt the deer,	58
We are friends of him whom you hold within,	27	And ever another rides his soul	59
And we fain would take him away	28	In the guise of a mortal fear.	60
"From those who ride fast on our heels	29	And ever the man he rides me hard,	61
With mind to do him wrong;	30	And never a night stays he;	62
They have no care for his innocence,	31	For I feel his curse as a haunted bough,	63
And the rope they bear is long."	32	On the trunk of a haunted tree.	64



Strange Fruit by Abel Meeropol

Southern trees bear a strange fruit,	1
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,	2
Black body swinging in the Southern breeze,	3
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.	4

Pastoral scene of the gallant South,	5
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,	6
Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh,	7
And the sudden smell of burning flesh!	8

Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck,	9
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,	10
For the sun to rot, for a tree to drop,	11
Here is a strange and bitter crop.	12



MONEY MISSISSIPPI by Eve Merriam

(News Item: Yesterday, in Money, Mississippi, the mutilated body of a 14-year-old Negro boy from Chicago was found in the river)

From Chicago to Mississippi 1
Young Emmett Till went down, 2
Down to visit some kinfolk 3
In a Mississippi town. 4

Now the name of that town is Money, 5
The name of that town is Money, 6
Name of that town is Money, 7
Dirty Money town. 8

Emmett Till never came back 9
From that Mississippi town. 10
Two white men murdered Emmett Till 11
In that Mississippi town. 12

And the name of that town is Money, 13
The name of that town is Money, 14
Name of that town is Money, 15
Bloody Money town. 16

Two white men shot him down 17
In that Mississippi town, 18
Threw him into the river 19
And left him there to drown. 20

Oh, the name of that town is Money, 21
The name of that town is Money, 22
Name of that town is Money, 23
Rotten Money town. 24

Oh, the name of that town is Money, 25
The name of that town is Money, 26
Name of that town is Money, 27
Rotten Money town. 28

Drag the river for Emmett Till 29
In that Mississippi town; 30
Drag the river for Justice, 31
Justice floating face down. 32

For the name of that town is Money, 33
The name of that town is Money, 34
Name of that town is Money, 35
Filthy Money town. 36

Where that young boy went to his death, 37
The murderers went free; 38
Where they let that young boy die, 39
They let the killers go free. 40

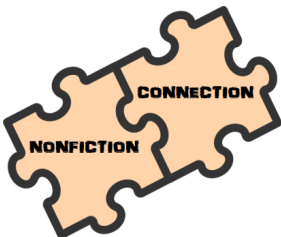
Where the name of that town is Money, 41
The name of that town is Money, 42
Name of that town is Money, 43
Evil Money town. 44

Raise up the body of Emmett Till 45
From that muddy river town; 46
Raise up the body of Justice 47
In that bloody Money town. 48

Bring home the body of Emmett Till 49
From that terrible Money town. 50
Bring home the body of Justice 51
With her blood-stained shining crown. 52



MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT



On Dec 1, 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks, an African-American, refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white passenger, as local law required. She was arrested. A few days later the black community in Montgomery began a bus boycott.

What's a boycott? A boycott is when a large group of people refuse to take part in, or make use of, something as a way of showing their disapproval. Because so many black people rode the bus, a boycott would cause the bus system to lose a lot of money.

The bus boycott was an immediate success. African-Americans walked, took taxis, and even rode horses, but they did not ride the bus. King agreed to head the organization leading the boycott, and Rosa Parks became a hero. It was the beginning of a new life for Parks and King. At the time, King was a new pastor. He had just finished school and had moved with his new wife to Montgomery to be a preacher.

The bus boycott lasted more than a year. Many people tried to get King to end the boycott by threatening him. King and the boycotters finally won. On November 13, 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington, D.C., agreed that Alabama's bus segregation laws were unconstitutional. (Unconstitutional means that the laws did not follow the U.S. Constitution and had to be struck down.) Because the U.S. Supreme Court made the decision, all states had to follow the ruling. King celebrated by riding the bus seated next to a white man.



BUS BOYCOTT

by Eve Merriam

Oh, the wheels used to turn at a slow and even pace	1
In Montgomery, Alabama, where good Negroes knew their place.	2
The wheels all kept rolling at a slow and steady pace	3
In Montgomery, Alabama, where good Negroes kept their place.	4
Till the first of December — that goes back quite a pace	5
When a good Negro woman took and kept her place.	6
"First come first served is only fair	7
I want no more and no less than my share."	8
<i>Don't you know your place is? Step back to the rear!</i>	9
"I know my place at last and I'm keeping it right here."	10
She stopped the old wheels cold in their worn — out pace,	11
That good Negro woman who knew and took her place.	12
January, February, Spring comes on apace	13
Since that good Negro woman took and kept her place -	14
And more and more move into place,	15
More and more get to know their place,	16
More and more holding firm to their place:	17
Right up front in the human race.	18

THE ELDERLY WALKING WOMAN

by Eve Merriam

Oh, ain't gonna ride no more, no more,	1
Ain't gonna ride no more;	2
Feet are weary, feet are sore,	3
But ain't gonna ride no more!	4
Got Jim Crow on the run, on the run,	5
Got Jim Crow on the run;	6
Feet are swollen, feelin numb,	7
But Jim Crow's on the run!	8
Old Jim Crow ridin out in a hearse,	9
Jim Crow in a hearse;	10
Feet are achin but it could be worse,	11
Got Jim Crow in a hearse!	12
Keep walkin to the Promised Land,	13
Where's that Promised Land?	14
Promised Land's right where we stand,	15
Here in our own land!	16
So take a hand and make a stand,	17
Walk along everyone!	18
Jim Crow on the buses. Don't get aboard.	19
Walk, walk, walk with the Lord.	20
Keep walking!	21

TOMORROW'S FOOTSTEPS by Eve Merriam

Walking, walking, keep walking along,	1
Walking, walking, been walking so long	2
Footsteps forced back on the sorrow road	3
Chains dragging the dust a heavy load	4
Bloody marks on tomorrow's road	5
Walking, walking, keep walking along ...	6
Master caught a runaway	7
Tomorrow my son rise another day	8
Rise up my brothers free today	9
How do they hold the line so long?	10
How do they hold the line so strong?	11
With Denmark Vesey the line is long.	12
With Harriet Tubman walking along.	13
With John Brown's body marching along.	14
With Frederick Douglass the line holds strong.	15
Footsteps joining from everywhere,	16
Heading for Justice and getting there!	17

SUNRISE MORNING by Eve Merriam

What web can be spun	1
To contain the rising sun?	2
<i>Call the sunrise subversive. A conspiracy.</i>	3
<i>Serve dawn with a subpoena.</i>	4
Oh, glory morning, the sun rose high,	5
Refused to set down in the same old sky!	6
Glory morning, how it got bright,	7
Glory morning, what a light!	8
Bright as noon, that shining dawn:	9
Justice morning coming on!	10
Walk, walk, through the dark night,	11
Walk, walk, daylight in sight,	12
Walk with the power-and-the-glory-light ...	13
The power and the glory come —	14
Oh, come along together!	15
The power and the glory come	16
Together in our strong grasp.	17
Here, out of the long dark night,	18
Handshake; daybreak;	19
The power and the glory bright:	20
Sunlight in our hands.	21

MONTGOMERY ALABAMA by Eve Merriam

Where is tomorrow born? How does the future start 1
 On a winter working day. In a Negro woman's heart. 2

Mrs. Rosa Parks got on board a bus, 3
 And all of a sudden started raising up a fuss ... 4

You know how sudden sister 5
 you know how sudden brother 6
 Like all the floors that were ever scrubbed 7
 On hands and knees bending over the tub 8
 Like all the wash ever hung out to dry 9
 Reaching up to the same dark sky 10

You know how sudden white sister? 11
 You know how sudden white brother? 12
 Back go back to my father and mother 13
 Go far go back to my great — grandmother 14
 Go deep go back to the very first slave 15
 That's how sudden it all began 16
 With the first woman torn from her child and man 17

Now Mrs. Rosa Parks gets on board a bus, 18
 And all of a sudden starts raising up a fuss ... 19
 "First come first served is only fair — 20
 Where there's a place to sit, I'm entitled to ride, 21
 And the Supreme Court is standing up right by my side. 22
 Why should I move back when a white man gets on board? 23
 We're all of us the same in the light of law and Lord." 24

On a chill December day, see the glowing sparks, 25
 Plain — talking splendor from Mrs. Rosa Parks. 26
 She sews for a living, there's not much pay, 27
 Sewing's tiresome, you get stooped and gray, 28
 Maybe she's got a headache, that's why she acts this way — 29

Mrs. Rosa Parks on board the bus 30
 all of a sudden raising up a fuss 31
 "I paid my fare that's due to this bus, 32
 I want what's fair and due to us, 33
 What's fair and overdue to us: 34
 Fair and equal I declare, 35
 Once you get a place — keep it there. 36
 Courtesy for everyone who steps in, 37
 Count the color of money, not the color of skin. 38
 This bus line's been kept going mostly by our race 39
 How about our own kind in some driver's place?" 40
 But how can you change custom 41
 and the way-it's-always-been? 42
 White drivers go clear back to original sin. 43
 Now step down, Rosa Parks. Move back to the rear. 44
 Mrs. Parks faces front. Justice Day is here! 45



WE DESERVE EQUALITY



BOYCOTT INJUSTICE!
BOYCOTT THE BUS TODAY!

She speaks her heart and mind; gets fourteen dollars fined. 46
 Seamstress for a living, that's many days' pay, 47
 But everyday Justice is here to stay: 48
 She won't move back to yesterday! 49

Now Mrs. Rosa Parks rises up in the bus — 50
Thank heavens, she's not raising any more fuss ... 51
 Mrs. Rosa Parks rises up in the bus, 52
 And speaks out tall for all of us. 53
 "If I can't ride in a fair and equal seat, 54
 I'll walk with the Lord and the true law of the land." 55
 So she rises and takes her stand. 56
 "I'll walk with the Lord and the true law of the land." 57
 She rises and marches to take her stand. 58

The next day no Negro gets on board a bus. 59
 How is it done without any fuss? 60
 How does the word of boycott get around? 61
 How do you hear the free and equal sound? 62
Long ago, another day, 63
Conductor Harriet Tubman on her way: 64
Not a track, not a marker was ever found 65
When her railway to freedom ran underground. 66

Now what is the sound the future makes? 67
 Not a threat. Not a shout. 68
 But not a bus rolls out. 69

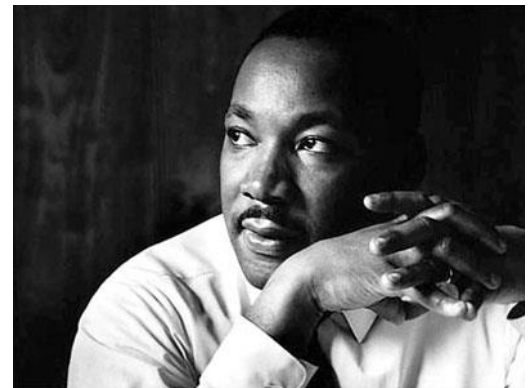
Listen. The earth shakes. But it's quiet. 70
 You can hear a pin drop, a cash register ring, 71
 But the bus lines don't ring up a single thing. 72

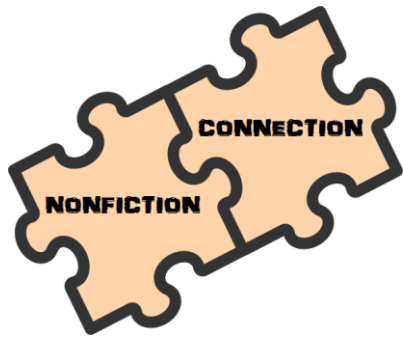
What is the sound the future makes? 73
 Not a shout. Not a sound. 74
 Just — not a wheel spins around. 75

What is the road the future takes? 76
 Footsteps ringing clear like a song, 77
 Winter patriots marching along, 78
 Ten, twenty, thirty, forty — fifty thousand strong! 79

Old wheels ground down in their worn — out way, 80
 New sound rising up for Justice Day! 81
 Jim Crow on the buses. Don't get aboard. 82
 Walk, walk, *walk* with the Lord. 83

In Montgomery, Alabama, the line is drawn. 84
 In Montgomery, Alabama, darkness into dawn. 85





Little Rock Nine

Three years after the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which officially ended public-school segregation, a federal court ordered Little Rock to comply. On September 4, 1957, Governor Orval Faubus defied the court, calling in the Arkansas National Guard to prevent nine African American students--"The Little Rock Nine"--from entering the building. Ten days later in a meeting with President Eisenhower, Faubus agreed to use the National Guard to protect the African American teenagers, but on returning to Little Rock, he dismissed the troops, leaving the African American students exposed to an angry white mob. Within hours, the jeering, brick-throwing mob had beaten several reporters and smashed many of the school's windows and doors. By noon, local police were forced to evacuate the nine students.

When Faubus did not restore order, President Eisenhower dispatched 101st Airborne Division paratroopers to Little Rock and put the Arkansas National Guard under federal command. By 3 a.m., soldiers surrounded the school, bayonets fixed.

Under federal protection, the "Little Rock Nine" finished out the school year. The following year, Faubus closed all the high schools, forcing the African American students to take correspondence courses or go to out-of-state schools. The school board reopened the schools in the fall of 1959, and despite more violence--for example, the bombing of one student's house--four of the nine students returned, this time protected by local police.

<http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/ak1.htm>

Little Rock Nine

The Little Rock Nine were a group of courageous black students who integrated the Arkansas capital city's Central High School in September 1957. They were: Minnijean Brown, Elizabeth Eckford, Ernest Green, Thelma Mothershed, Melba Pattillo, Gloria Ray, Terrence Roberts, Jefferson Thomas, and Carlotta Walls. Initially thwarted by violent white mobs and National Guard troops who refused to help, the students eventually entered school after President Dwight Eisenhower ordered paratroopers to protect them. Brown was expelled in February 1958 after verbally responding to a racial slur, but the other eight stayed, and on May 29, Green became the first of the group -- and the first African American -- to graduate from Central High.

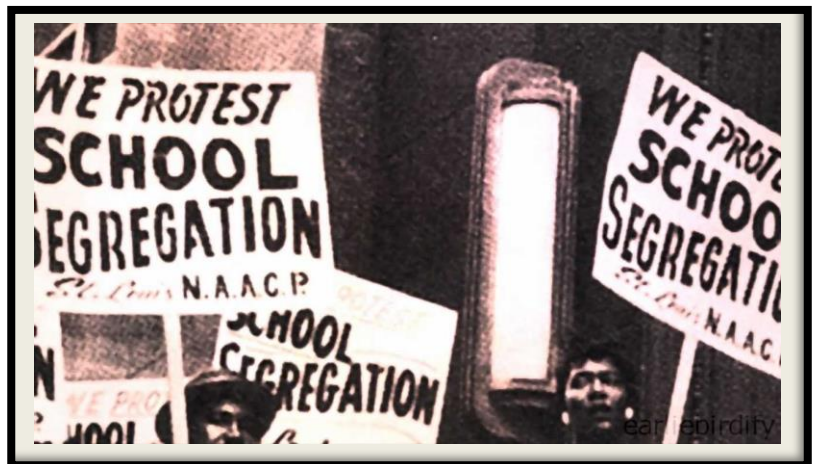
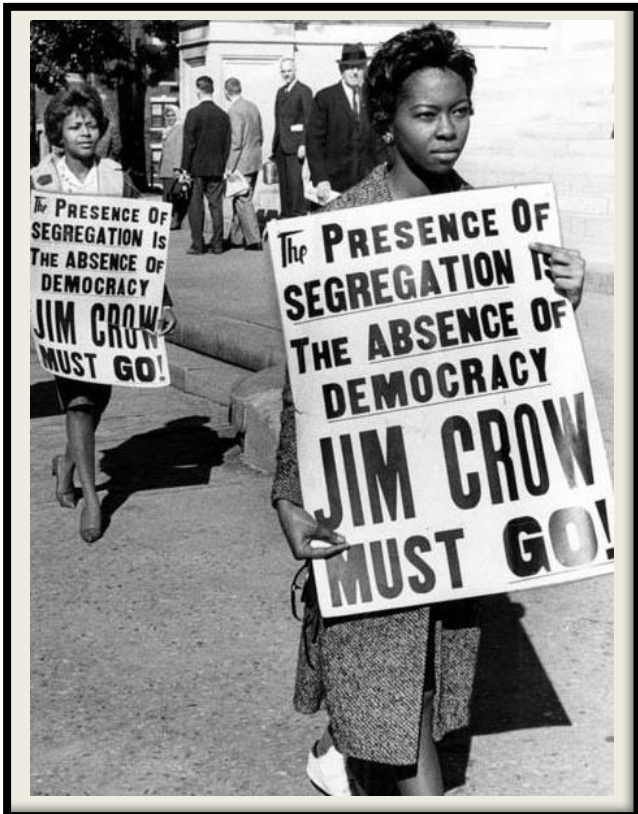
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesonthepize/profiles/44_little_rock.html

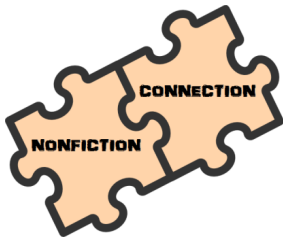
THE LITTLE GIRL FROM LITTLE ROCK

by Joan Dresner Bernstein

Policemen and Federalized National Guardsmen	1
Brothers and cousins in the Klan	2
Stood at the curb on both sides of her	3
Holding big dogs, bred to track game, convicts and niggers,	4
On long leashes.	5
Leaping, snarling, salivating	6
Hunting dogs straining	7
To set their teeth	8
In the American flesh of the little girl.	9
Who walked between them.	10
A brown skinned ninth grade student	11
With short hair, plaid dress, and books	12
Facing forward, walking forward.	13
A brave, every day American girl going to school	14
Down the middle of the street.	15
Out-of-step with the dogs	16
Out-of-step with the sidewalk hate chorus	17
Reaching, screaming, snarling, spitting	18
Everyday American townspeople	19
Imprinting words into her flesh forever.	20
She walked to a baiting, hating, hog-tied Governor	21
And his power hose color guard at the steps	22
A martyr for the President	23
And the waiting world press.	24
She stayed the course with 7 others	25
They had to swallow so much hate	26
I nursed the first of four white babies	27
Vicariously safe in '58.	28
I nursed the fourth in August, 1963,	29
Sat sad and proud of Dr. King	30
Hoping that his words would gather	31
Jobs and peace for the aggrieved.	32
Thirty years passed like a shadow	33
A rally in DC in August 1993	34
An anniversary, a new call	35
For Jobs and Peace	36
Busses were cancelled because money was scarce.	37
I was in a van of civil rights workers from the '50s	38
I sat across the aisle	39
From the shorthaired, brown-skinned girl in the plaid dress.	40
She slumped in her seat reeling before the first stop.	41
Feeling the old experience.	42
Folding herself into a ball.	43
She said it was flu but it wasn't.	44
The rest of us knew.	45

The Klansmen were there, too.	46
Had she sensed what would be?	47
Does whispered hate wait forever?	48
It was there. In every parking lot we pulled into,	49
Waiting.	50
"Don't get out of the van," they ordered.	51
Venom on their tongues.	52
"Can we get take-out," I, the white one, asked?	53
"Can I and one other use your restroom?"	54
"Yir with them ain't ya? Get out of this parking lot.	55
We have a private party in here."	56
And so it was except for McDonalds.	57
From Dallas, Texas to Washington, D.C. on the interstate. Then was now	58
Same power.	59
Same hyenas shepherding	60
The end of the road stop	61
Same show, blacks in a big car, using the side of the road.	62
There are challenges, colleges,	63
Opportunities to be middle class	64
If you walked the line and were bootstrap	65
At the same time.	66
Except for this	67
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend?	68
Are we on the downslope of hate?	69
Ask the ADL, Ask Klanwatch.	70
Ask her.	71





16th Street Baptist Church Bombing

On September 15, 1963, the congregation of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama greeted each other before the start of Sunday service. In the basement of the church, five young girls, two of them sisters, gathered in the ladies room in their best dresses, happily chatting about the first days of the new school year. It was Youth Day and excitement filled the air, they were going to take part in the Sunday adult service.

Just before 11 o'clock, instead of rising to begin prayers the congregation was knocked to the ground. As a bomb exploded under the steps of the church, they sought safety under the pews and shielded each other from falling debris. In the basement, 14-year-olds Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, and 11-year-old Cynthia Wesley were killed. Addie's sister Susan survived, but was permanently blinded.

In the moments after the explosion, questions hung in the air - 'Where is my loved one?' 'Are they ok?' 'How much longer can this violence last?' They did not ask if this was an accident, they knew that this was a bomb that had exploded as it had dozens of times before in "Bombingham."

The Aftermath

Upon learning of the bombing at the Church, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. sent a telegram to Alabama Governor George Wallace, a staunch and vocal segregationist, stating bluntly: 'The blood of our little children is on your hands.' The brutal attack and the deaths of the four little girls shocked the nation and drew international attention to the violent struggle for civil rights in Birmingham. Many whites were as outraged by the incident as blacks and offered services and condolences to the families. Over, 8,000 people attended the girls' funeral service at Reverend John Porter's Sixth Avenue Baptist Church.

The deaths of the four girls was followed two months later by the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, causing an outpouring of national grief, galvanizing the civil rights movement and ensuring the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Why This Church?

16th Street Baptist was a large and prominent church located downtown, just blocks from Birmingham's commercial district and City Hall. Since its construction in 1911, the church had served as the centerpiece of the city's African American community, functioning as a meeting place, social center, and lecture hall. Because of its size, location, and importance to the community, the church served as headquarters for civil rights mass meetings and rallies in the early 1960s.

Birmingham was the most segregated city in the United States and in April 1963, after an invitation by Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth to come help desegregate Birmingham, the city became the focus of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The desegregation campaign conceived by Shuttlesworth was known as "Project C" and was to be a series of nonviolent protests and boycotts.

Despite resistance from some of the church's leadership and members of the congregation, the 16th Street Baptist Church joined the SCLC in their campaign. The church became the departure point for many of the demonstrations that took place in the city. On May 2, 1963, students ranging in age from eight to eighteen gathered at the church to march downtown and talk to the new mayor about segregation. After leaving the church they were met by police and many were jailed. By the time the "Children's Crusade" and the ensuing demonstrations ended on May 10th, thousands of children and adults had been injured by fire hoses and attack dogs and incarcerated by order of "Bull" Connor, Commissioner of Public Safety.

The church came to be viewed by many as a symbol and a rallying place for civil rights activists; and it became the focal point for racial tensions and white hostility towards the civil rights movement in Birmingham.

Ballad of Birmingham

By Dudley Randall

"Mother dear, may I go downtown	1	She has combed and brushed her night-dark hair,	17
Instead of out to play,	2	And bathed rose petal sweet,	18
And march the streets of Birmingham	3	And drawn white gloves on her small brown hands,	19
In a Freedom March today?"	4	And white shoes on her feet.	20
"No, baby, no, you may not go,	5	The mother smiled to know that her child	21
For the dogs are fierce and wild,	6	Was in the sacred place,	22
And clubs and hoses, guns and jails	7	But that smile was the last smile	23
Aren't good for a little child."	8	To come upon her face.	24
"But, mother, I won't be alone.	9	For when she heard the explosion,	25
Other children will go with me,	10	Her eyes grew wet and wild.	26
And march the streets of Birmingham	11	She raced through the streets of Birmingham	27
To make our country free."	12	Calling for her child.	28
"No baby, no, you may not go	13	She clawed through bits of glass and brick,	29
For I fear those guns will fire.	14	Then lifted out a shoe.	30
But you may go to church instead	15	"O, here's the shoe my baby wore,	31
And sing in the children's choir."	16	But, baby, where are you?"	32

Birmingham 1963

by Raymond R. Patterson

Sunday morning and her mother's hands	1
Weaving the two thick braids of her springing hair,	2
Pulling her sharply by one bell-rope when she would	3
Not sit still, setting her ringing,	4
While the radio church choir prophesied the hour	5
With theme and commercials, while the whole house tingled;	6
As she could not stand still in that awkward air;	7
Her dark face shining, her mother now moving the tiny buttons,	8
Blue against blue, the dress which took all night making,	9
That refused to stay fastened;	10
There was some pull which hurried her out to Sunday School	11
Toward the lesson and the parable's good news,	12
The quiet escape from the warring country of her feelings,	13
The confused landscape of grave issues and people.	14
But now we see	15
Now we see through the glass of her mother's wide screaming	16
Eyes into the room where the homemade bomb	17
Blew the room down where her daughter had gone:	18
Under the leaves of hymnals, the plaster and stone,	19
The blue dress, all undone –	20
The day undone to the bone –	21
Her still, dull face, her quiet hair;	22
Alone amid the rubble, amid the people	23
Who perish, being innocent.	24

Birmingham Sunday by Langston Hughes

BIRMINGHAM SUNDAY (September 15, 1963)

Four little girls	1
Who went to Sunday School that day	2
And never came back home at all--	3
But left instead	4
Their blood upon the wall	5
With spattered flesh	6
And bloodied Sunday dresses	7
Scorched by dynamite that	8
China made aeons ago	9
Did not know what China made	10
Before China was ever Red at all	11
Would ever redden with their blood	12
This Birmingham-on-Sunday wall.	13
Four tiny little girls	14
Who left their blood upon that wall,	15
In little graves today await:	16
The dynamite that might ignite	17
The ancient fuse of Dragon Kings	18
Whose tomorrow sings a hymn	19
The missionaries never taught	20
In Christian Sunday School	21
To implement the Golden Rule.	22
Four little girls	23
Might be awakened someday soon	24
By songs upon the breeze	25
As yet unfelt among	26
Magnolia trees.	27



I, Too by Langston Hughes

I, too, sing America. 1
I am the darker brother. 2
They send me to eat in the kitchen 3
When company comes, 4

But I laugh, 5
And eat well, 6
And grow strong. 7

Tomorrow, 8
I'll be at the table 9
When company comes. 10
Nobody'll dare 11
Say to me, 12
"Eat in the kitchen," 13
Then. 14

Besides, 15
They'll see how beautiful I am 16
And be ashamed-- 17
I, too, am America. 18

"A dream deferred is a dream denied."

- Langston Hughes

Harlem (A Dream Deferred)

by Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred? 1
Does it dry up 2
like a raisin in the sun? 3
Or fester like a sore— 4
And then run? 5
Does it stink like rotten meat? 6
Or crust and sugar over— 7
like a syrupy sweet? 8

Maybe it just sags 9
like a heavy load. 10

Or does it explode? 11



The Negro Speaks of Rivers

by Langston Hughes

I've known rivers: 1
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the 2
flow of human blood in human veins. 3
My soul has grown deep like the rivers. 4
I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young. 5
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep. 6
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it. 7
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln 8
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy 9
bosom turn all golden in the sunset. 10
I've known rivers: 11
Ancient, dusky rivers. 12
My soul has grown deep like the rivers. 13

You've Got to Be Carefully Taught

by Rodgers and Hammerstein

You've got to be taught to hate and fear	1
You've got to be taught from year to year	2
It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear	3
You've got to be carefully taught	4
You've got to be taught to be afraid	5
Of people whose eyes are oddly made	6
And people whose skin is a different shade	7
You've got to be carefully taught	8
You've got to be taught before it's too late	9
Before you are six or seven or eight	10
To hate all the people your relatives hate	11
You've got to be carefully taught	12
You've got to be carefully taught	13

Day's Work

author unknown

Every day at sunup and sundown,	1
she takes a crosstown bus	2
to work as a maid and laundress,	3
to wash and wax and dust.	4
In a uniform of gray and white,	5
cardboard lining worn-out shoes,	6
she works so hard to make ends meet,	7
she hasn't time for the blues.	8
Elbow grease from basement to bedroom,	9
she spends all morning on her knees	10
scrubbing till the whole house shines	11
even corners no one sees.	12
In her kitchen cabinet,	13
a jar of dollar bills.	14
She never went to college,	15
but swears her children will.	16

